

Joel Roberts Poinsett to Andrew Jackson, November 25, 1832, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

1 See Poinsett's letters of this period in vol. IV., pp. 481–501, *passim* .

Charleston, November 25, 1832.

Dear Sir, The public papers will have informed you of the proceedings of the convention of this state now sitting in Columbia. You will perceive, by the project of the Committee, that these rash and inconsiderate men contemplate disunion if the government should find it necessary to act with energy. I always thought this to be the end and aim of some of the leaders of the Nullification party. It is rumoured, that Major—no, Brigadier General Hamilton is to bring down with him two regiments of Infantry chosen from the districts most addicted to Nullification to keep us in order; and further, that it was in contemplation to take possession of the forts as a measure of precaution. The measures which you have wisely taken will prevent the execution of this scheme. If the ordinances are passed in conformity with the project of the Committee it is probable, as they will be foiled in their intended *coup de main* , that nothing violent will be attempted before the 1st of February, as the Union party count among their numbers several militia officers and a fair proportion of the volunteer corps in this city. The Nullifiers however have all the artillery. We might muster from 500 to 1000 men if we could arm them. I speak of the force of the Union party because I wish it to be brought into action if force must be used by the government. I think it all important, that we, the Union party, should be prepared to resist any illegal act of violence, then protest against the proceedings of the Convention, declare ourselves the true Representatives of the state and ask the aid of the general Government to protect us. Such a proceeding would enlist the feelings and sympathies of the states in our favor; whereas it is to be feared, that if the general government is compelled single handed to

Library of Congress

coerce these men, which could easily be done, the sympathies of the people, especially of the South would be in favor of the Nullifiers. If such a movement as the one here indicated could be made in Charleston and in Greenville where our strong force lies—Greenville and Spartanburg—it certainly would be successfull—because in Charleston we could receive the succour of the regular troops in the harbour and in Greenville of the Militia of North Carolina and Ten[n]essee, which would suffocate this rebellion at once. These men look forward with certainty to the assistance of Great Britain in any contest they may have with the general government, and some persons believe that they have held communication with and had assurances from that government of succour and protection. This I do not credit, but I think it proper to communicate to you the rumours as well as the certainty of the hopes and expectations they entertain. I am decidedly of opinion, that whenever the Government is compelled to act it should be done with such an overwhelming force as to put down at once all hopes of successfull opposition and that the two points to be acted upon are Charleston and Greenville or Spartanburg. I do not know whether I can prevail upon the Union party to take the lead in both places but they ought to do so for their own safety and for the honor of the State, and I will use every effort in my power to induce them to take this attitude. The declarations of these men that in certain case, they will seek foreign alliances and their determination to secede unless the government supinely submits to all their demands will render it necessary to act with energy and to act promptly. If this State is allowed to secede and as a soveriegn state shall form an intimate alliance with Great Britain, as she most certainly would do, she would have British ships of war constantly in the harbour and in case of any quarrel between the States and Great Britain would allow that nation to make Carolina a *place d'armes* , or in any difference between her and the rest of the States might deliver up the forts to British force, and defy the utmost power of the Union. The safety of the whole nation requires therefore, that South Carolina should not be allowed to carry her factious resolutions into effect. It is a very different case as the matter now stands. Great Britain would certainly not interfere in the domestic quarrel as long as it were such, but if by common consent South Carolina is permitted to secede from the Union and Great Britain were to form an intimate alliance with her,

Library of Congress

which there are many motives to induce that nation to do, then it would be a peaceful and legal act and she might bind herself to defend South Carolina against the rest of the Union whenever the *casus federis* required it. To this no reasonable objection could be taken, and South Carolina would be at once converted into a smuggling mart from whence to deluge the States with british manufactures. But if the Government of the union determines to prevent South Carolina from committing this rash act and at once ruining the prosperity of this Republic, no foreign power would have a pretext for interfering and sure I am that no foreign power would interfere. Indeed it would be easy to put these men down in one little month, so that there would be no time for any such application to be made. Now in my opinion the threats which have been made and so frequently repeated of calling in the aid of Great Britain, the expectation which is openly entertained that the british fleet will be at our doors to raise the blockade of the port, the certainty that these men would at once deliver up the forts to such a force, if it were to appear, to be held against the United States render it imperative upon you to put these forts in complete repair and so to garrison them as to prevent their being taken by the forces of any foreign or domestic enemy. For this purpose more men are required and two vessels of war and I do think they ought to be sent without delay.

Connected with this subject is one of great importance to this city. It was urged upon the government of Mr. Monroe to make Charleston a naval depot for the West India squadron and if this had been done, the union party would never have lost its ascendancy in this city. Nay more if the Government had when it was in its power to do so, have employed our own mechanics we might have retained it; but with a view to economy badly understood I think when the preservation of the Union is at stake, Northern Mechanics have been invariably employed, when our own were starving. This has irritated them almost to madness and on a late occasion we had some difficulty in preventing the mechanics from pulling down the marine Hospital, which is badly situated in order to save four thousand dollars and being built by an imported Mechanic in order to save a trifle more. This is done and I do not mean to complain; but to urge that Government now avail

Library of Congress

itself of every opportunity of employing our mechanics. In my opinion no measure would contribute more to pacify Carolina, preserve the Union and save the effusion of blood than to make Charleston a naval Depôt for the West India station. I transmit you herewith the documents to show the great advantages that would result from this arrangement to the Service. Captn. Kearney 2 was of opinion, that this was the fittest port for that purpose, so is Captn. Shubrick 3 and so would any unprejudiced officer be who page would visit it and compare its advantages with those of Pensacola. I know the navy Commissioners are opposed to it and prefer the Tortugas; but I do earnestly entreat you not to suffer their prejudices to prevent the adoption of a measure which will save the Country from a civil war. Such a measure would secure our ascendancy in the City and furnish a pretext for sending a naval force here.

2 Capt. Lawrence Kearny (1789–1868).

3 Capt. William B. Shubrick (1790–1874), afterward rear-admiral.

I have several other subjects on which I wish to write to you, and will do so by tomorrows mail. The Documents I referred to may be found in the department. They were presented in 1825 and in 1826. there is a report published by order of Senate on the expediency of establishing a navy yard in Charleston by Captn. Kearney. Not only was this refused; but an order issued that no vessel of war should touch at Charleston for repairs or supplies, an order which lost the government many friends, and wh. was injudicious to say the least of it. I sent you yesterday a report of the state of the forts in this harbour.

I am Dear Sir respectfully yours

[*Indorsement in Jackson's hand:*] Mr. Poinsett, on the best means to put down Nulli'n to be promptly answered thro' P. M. at B. McSheaner, 25th Nov. 1832.

[*In another hand:*] Proposes measures to resist the Nullifiers.

Library of Congress

The Gen's reply shows his own resolve.